

COMMITTEE: NORTH LUTON AREA BOARD
DATE: 15TH OCTOBER 2015
SUBJECT: PETITION -
CORONATION MEADOW – RIVERSIDE WALK
REPORT BY: HEAD OF ENGINEERING AND STREET SERVICES

CONTACT OFFICER: BARRY TIMMS 546702

IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL	✓	COMMUNITY SAFETY
EQUALITIES		ENVIRONMENT
FINANCIAL	✓	CONSULTATIONS
STAFFING		OTHER ✓

WARDS AFFECTED: LIMBURY

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is for Members to consider a petition from residents living in the Limbury area requesting that the Council return the meadow back to short grass.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. **NORTH LUTON AREA COMMITTEE is recommended to instruct officers to take no action in respect of this request in line with option 1 paragraph 10**

BACKGROUND

3. The River Lea Corridor is recognised as an area of wildlife and nature conservation value from as far back as 1991 when Dr John Dony identified the stretch between Bramingham Rd & Icknield Way as having many plant rarities.

4. In accordance with these policies, in 2003, Limbury Meads between Bramingham Rd & Icknield Way was accepted by English Nature into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The objectives for this area are “To enhance the landscape of the River Lea and the grassland will be managed sympathetically to further recreate a natural setting. For biodiversity, the requirements are “To benefit the local water vole population by undertaking sensitive waterside habitat management and increase the plant species feeding area for butterflies managed by an annual hay crop creating ideal summer cover for the voles. See plan attached at Appendix A which shows the areas of land covered by this stewardship scheme as Area 1
5. The funding released through this scheme and its successor (Higher Level Stewardship- since 2013) has supported the grass cutting ever since. With current budget constraints it is essential to maximise income from this scheme to continue the annual maintenance regime.

REPORT

6. In 2009, LBC Regeneration Service & Parks launched a period of wide and lengthy consultation, which was undertaken by Groundwork & LBC colleagues covering the entire open space from Bramingham Rd to Bancroft Rd & including Icknield Rec, and this included a public consultation event on site, and leafletting of 500 local households by the local Friends group representative.
7. This consultation lead to this meadow area being included in the action plan occurred in 2012. The meadow is identified as being an area that would most benefit from the introduction of a mowing regimes that will promote wildflower meadows
8. Since 2013 the Wildlife Trust have been partners with conservation management along the River Lea, and in early 2014 Luton were approached the wildlife Trust who suggested the riverside location at Limbury would be an ideal site for a national Coronation Meadow for the following reasons
 - As it fitted with the overall scheme criteria,
 - The conservation aspiration for this land had been endorsed in earlier consultations
 - Crucially it is a riverside location similar to the seed donor meadow at Fancott, which should therefore support similar vegetation.
9. Following further discussion with Parks Officers in September 2014, and soil testing to confirm site suitability, it was agreed by the Parks Manager because there had been an extensive consultation work which that had

been completed that it could go forward as a Coronation Meadow, which will be the only one in county, which was finally accepted by the scheme promoters earlier this year.

10. Attached Appendix A shows Area 1 that is under the stewardship agreement and Area 2, both these areas have been cultivated a total of approximately 20,000 square metres to form the meadow. Seed has been sown in Area 1 and Area 2 in September which resulted in the concerns expressed by the local residents.
11. Officers responded by arranging a site meeting on the 20th September 2015 at 11.00am with a purpose of identifying the residents' concerns which were are no room for children to play or for family to have picnics and that dog walkers have no access. At the meeting it was made clear that a feedback session would be given at the ward forum. Latterly this was moved to the area board as a petition has been received
12. A petition was received on the 7th October with a 173 residents as signatories indicating that ' we object to the whole field being taken as we thought the half adjoining the river would be more appropriate- then the children could play on the rest of the field, plus family picnics dog walkers etc. '.
13. Members should be aware that there is an alternative mown grass areas available for children to play football just 50 metre away over the bridge, again indicated on the attached plan Appendix A area 3.
14. It is intended that a pathway network will be mown into the meadow to facilitate walking through the meadow to enjoy the flowers. Small areas could be mown for people to have picnics.

PROPOSAL/OPTION

Members are asked to select from the options listed below in respect of Coronation Meadow which is the addition to the conservation regime;

Option 1

15. Members to accept that the balance between general parks access and conservation improvement is acceptable including the introduction of the meadow and take no action thus safeguarding the income to maintain the conservation areas of the riverside walk whilst also contributing positively to this authorities statutory duty to conserve bio diversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Option 2

16. Members to consider reducing the size of the new meadow by 1000 square metres as shown on Appendix B to provide a kick about area,

with a pathway network mown into the meadow to facilitate walking through the meadow to enjoy the flowers. Small areas could be mown for people to have picnics. .

Option 3

17. To accept the petition request and return the area shown as area 2 on the attached plan to grass land (10,000 square metre) leaving the Coronation Meadow to the area 1. This would mean a loss of income of £8,000 and in addition and the council funding the required reinstatement.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

18. The whole scheme is for a three year programme of which this is year two (15/16) with a total cost of £8000

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

19. This report has been cleared by the councils legal section

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D

There are no background papers.